



Weaknesses in Amtrak's drug and alcohol testing controls expose company to potential financial, safety risks

For Immediate Release

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WASHINGTON – Amtrak was unaware that some employees in safety-sensitive positions had drug- or alcohol-related issues due to weaknesses in its controls for detecting such issues, according to an Amtrak Office of Inspector General report released today.

The OIG also found that some employees were not subject to required tests, not all supervisors were trained to detect the signs of potential impairment in their employees, collection of testing data was inefficient and paper-based, and Amtrak's oversight of prescription drug use was limited because employees failed to self-report prescription and over-the-counter drug use as company policy requires.

Additionally, employees found to have drug- or alcohol-related issues were more likely to violate major operating rules, sustain workplace injuries, and have higher median medical costs than employees who were not found to have used drugs or alcohol, the report said.

Amtrak conducts drug and alcohol tests before employees are hired, annually for locomotive engineers, and every three years for other employees in safety-sensitive positions. The company also conducts tests after safety incidents, if there is reasonable suspicion of impairment of an employee, and after absences longer than 30 days. Additionally, employees who return to work after a positive drug test are tested at least six times during the next 12 months after their return.

When reviewing the effectiveness of Amtrak's efforts to detect drug and alcohol issues among its employees in safety-sensitive positions, the OIG found the company may have underestimated the extent of workplace drug and alcohol use among those employees. Among more than 6,000 employees in safety-sensitive positions between 2014 and 2016, the company identified 153 who had drug- or alcohol-related issues through its use of testing and counseling. The OIG, using de-identified medical claims data to protect employee privacy, found an additional 169 employees in such positions for whom claims related to drug or alcohol use, abuse, or dependence had been filed.

The OIG also found that application of testing requirements was inconsistent. For example, locomotive engineers are required to undergo drug tests during annual physical exams. However, of the 783 locomotive engineers employed between 2014 and 2016, 33 had not had a single periodic drug test during their annual physical exams and 57 percent of all engineers had fewer than three of the required tests. For employees in safety-sensitive positions subject to periodic testing every three years, the OIG found that 755 out of 1,955 did not have a single periodic drug test between 2014 and 2016. Additionally, OIG analysis found that among the 858 employees required to be tested after returning to duty after extended periods of time, 110 did not complete the tests.

For some employees returning to duty after testing positive for drugs or alcohol, the OIG found that required follow-up tests were not always completed. In 2014 and 2015, 40 employees tested positive for drugs or alcohol, but 16 did not complete all their required follow-up tests. In one case, a locomotive engineer was required to be tested 12 times after returning to duty but was tested only once. The following year, the same engineer was required to be tested 11 times, but again was only tested once and tested positive on that test.

Company officials said they did not know why the engineer did not receive all required tests but affirmed that they now track and schedule monthly follow-up tests and inform responsible supervisors if employees fail to take the required tests, according to the report.

The OIG also found that weaknesses with the company's collection of testing data and inaccuracies in testing databases for safety-sensitive employees resulted in test data that had to be discarded, employees who had to be retested, and employees who were not subject to required tests. For example, the company used paper forms to collect testing data, and, in some cases, data was illegible or was missing from the forms entirely. Additionally, a technical issue allowed 107 employees in safety-sensitive positions to be excluded from a drug and alcohol testing database that the company used for selecting employees for random testing. As a result, these employees were working without being subject to random tests, according to the OIG.

The OIG recommended that Amtrak establish a reliable procedure to track and monitor required drug and alcohol testing of employees in safety-sensitive positions, ensure the database it uses to select employees for random testing includes all employees in safety-sensitive positions, and establish a process to ensure that supervisors complete the requisite training on how to identify employees who are potentially impaired. Additionally, the OIG recommended implementation of new measures to encourage employees in safety-sensitive positions to self-report their prescription drug use, as required by company policy.

The company agreed with all the OIG's recommendations. More information is available in the full report: <https://direc.to/kiMJ>.

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